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SUBJECT: TURKEY: DIYARBAKIR CIVIL SOCIETY REACTS  
COLLECTIVELY, CONSTRUCTIVELY TO BOMBING

REF: ANKARA 5269

¶1. (SBU) On September 12, a bomb exploded in a poor section of Diyarbakir, the heart of Turkey's heavily Kurdish southeast, killing 10 and injuring 17. Initial speculation focused on two scenarios: that it was either a Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) bomb that had gone off prematurely during transport, or a "provocation" along the lines of the November 2005 bookstore bombing in Semdinli, Hakkari province. According to Diyarbakir Governor Elfan Ala, with whom Adana PO and Ankara PolCouns met on September 27, the investigation remains incomplete but may well end up pointing to the PKK.

¶2. (SBU) Across the board, political and civil society leaders with whom we met described the city's reaction to the bombing. According to pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP) mayor Osman Baydemir, they may not know who perpetrated the bombing, but they knew they wanted -- at all costs -- to avoid a repetition of the violent rioting that occurred in March following the killing of a dozen PKK militants. As a result, civil society organizations and parties across the political spectrum, bolstered in particular by the Diyarbakir Chambers of Commerce, banded together for a silent vigil against violence.

¶3. (SBU) According to Chambers of Commerce President Sah-Ismail Bedirhanoglu, he had been working for approximately one year with other business and professional NGOs to build the foundations of a civic platform. After the September bombing -- with the memory of March fresh in their minds -- they reached out to the mayor and other political party leaders. Together, they organized the vigil. Unadvertised, since they feared that too much publicity risked attracting those who might want to provoke a different sort of reaction, 10,000 gathered to say "no" to violence. Every organization with which we met -- economic, human rights, bar association, political party -- confirmed their participation in this event.

¶4. (SBU) Comment: This was an extraordinary -- to our knowledge, unprecedented -- show of civil society organization in an area of Turkey known more for discord than broad-based agreement. A number of factors made it possible. At the top of the list is the business community, which boasts solid, smart leaders who are determined to continue to improve the local economy. Another is the relative maturity of the Diyarbakir NGO community. Good relations across the board with city hall and a smart state-appointed governor helped, too. In addition, all knew a PKK ceasefire was in the works and did not want to risk derailing that. Finally, had Diyarbakir not had its brush with violence in March, there may not have been the impetus for this effort. The vigil received little press play, but its silence -- and positive significance for society -- speak louder than the bomb that triggered it.

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